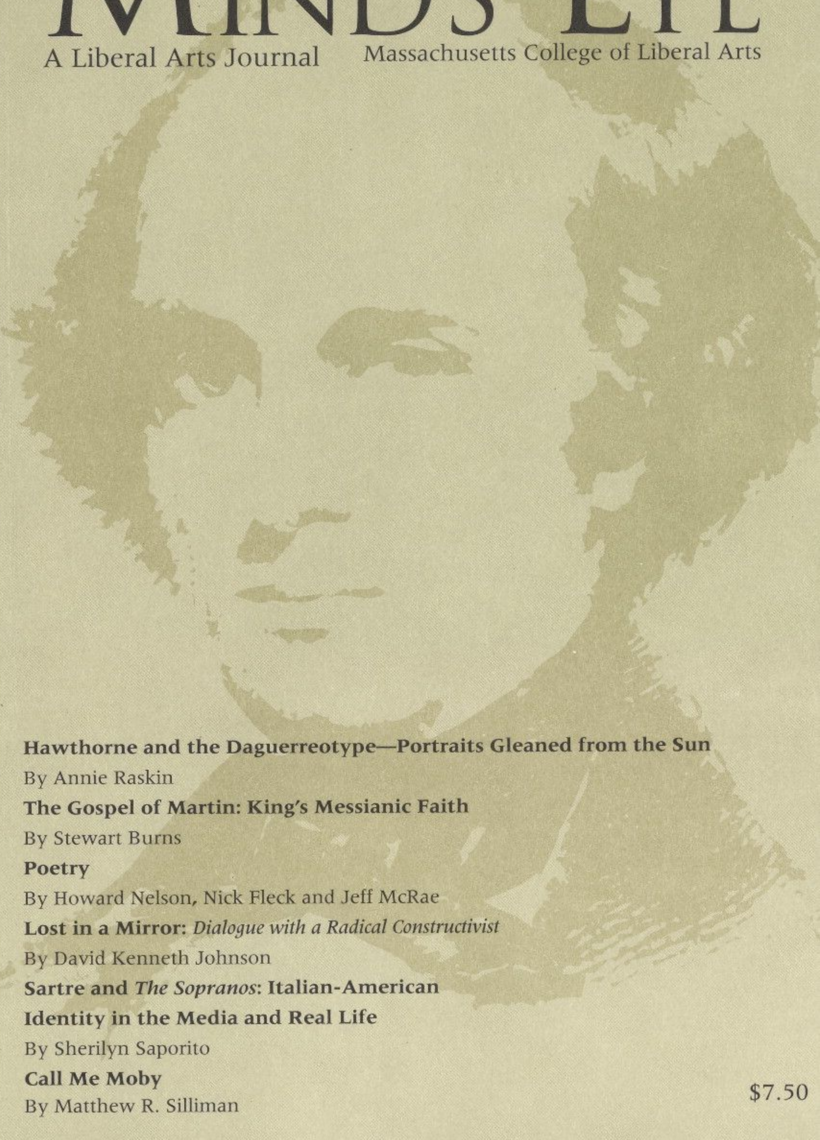
Spring 2005

THE MIND'S EYE

A Liberal Arts Journal

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts



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Editor's File

In this issue we are fortunate to include two pairs of essays, each with a strikingly different perspective. In our first essay, Annie Raskin introduces us to the daguerreotype in the work of Hawthorne, while in our last essay Sherilyn Saporito takes up images of Italian-Americans in film and television. The contrast between the two is significant. Hawthorne, writing before the Civil War, encouraged his readers to imagine that the daguerreotype provided an insight into character, but Saporito shows that modern film and television images of Italian-Americans frequently distort and defame. In our second essay, Stewart Burns reflects on the importance of religious faith in the heroic life of Martin Luther King, Jr. He fastens on King's undoctrinaire idea of "soul force" as a power capable of bringing justice to human beings, joining both black and white Americans in a more perfect union. At the same time, David Johnson presents himself as a participant in an extended dialogue about the nature of reason. Johnson's spokesman defends fallibilistic realism in a contest against a radical constructivist, whose doctrine makes claims in the name of an entire world of reasonable knowers yet cannot consistently affirm their existence.

We are fortunate to be able to offer the work of three thoughtful poets. Howard Nelson ponders the value of religious belief and our failures in personal kindness to loved ones. Jeff McRae evokes the experience of personal loss by those left behind, and Nick Fleck considers the passage of time and the end of a season. In a less pensive mood, Matt Silliman has reviewed Melville's *Moby-Dick,* from the jaundiced perspective of the whale himself.

Bill Montgomery, *Managing Editor*

Hawthorne and the Daguerreotype—Portraits Gleaned from the Sun[1]

BY ANNIE RASKIN

In a letter to Sophia Peabody in 1839, Hawthorne wished "there was something in the intellectual world analogous to the Daguerrotype [sic] . . . in the visible—something which should print off our deepest and subtlest, and delicatest thoughts and feelings, as minutely and accurately as the above-mentioned instrument paints the various aspects of Nature" (*The Letters, 1813–1843*, ed. Thomas Woodson et al., qtd. in Williams 114).

The public reception in America to the invention of photography was overwhelming. This miraculous new way of creating an image that was seen as the absolute truth altered forever the ways in which we think about and respond to image. For writers and visual artists the "magic picture mania" was both a fascination and an opportunity to examine the old tension between image and word, as well as to ponder the camera as an agent of seeing.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was the first in America to use the daguerreotype as a narrative device in fiction. I am interested in looking at the ways in which the daguerreotype posed serious artistic and personal questions and concerns for Hawthorne, the manner in which he portrayed those concerns and, as well, his introduction of the daguerreotype into fiction in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851).

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[1] This essay constitutes a revised version of a lecture delivered at a benefit for Freel Library at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams, Massachussetts, on October 15, 2004, in honor of the Hawthorne Bicentennial.

Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre developed his process of fixing an image concocted of light onto a metal plate, creating the first daguerreotype, in 1839 in France. The process produced an image, small enough to be easily held in the hand, normally contained in a boxlike frame with a cover that latched closed. Because the image is fixed on a polished silver plate, the viewer, holding it, has to turn it to just the right angle to make the image come into focus, making, in a sense, the portrait appear to be animated, to mimic life. If turned only slightly at another angle, the image disappears, leaving only the reflection of the viewer's face on the polished metal plate. As Alan Trachtenberg points out in his seminal essay "The Emergence of a Keyword," from its inception, photography (literally, *writing with light)*:

> entered the world not just as a process of picture making but as a word, a linguistic practice. It was not very long before "daguerreotype" became a common verb that meant telling the literal truth of things. With its subset of terms, like *image* and *reflect, lens* and *shutter, light* and *shade*, the words *photography* and *daguerreotype* provided a way of expressing ideas about how the world can be known—about truth and falseness, appearance and reality, accuracy, exactitude and impartiality. The power attributed to the medium made the name into a keyword, a potential analogy for other human activities. (17)

Photography, soon after its introduction, became a standard for the realistic portrayal of life. In Daguerre's own words announcing his invention, "The DAGUERREOTYPE is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; on the contrary it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself" (13). Agency for the photograph is thus placed in the hands of nature. Photography—scientific, mechanical and "natural," gleaned from the light of the sun, not from an artist's hand—was accepted as absolute truth. It would take decades for the realization that the operant, the photographer, has a part in defining the image, as does the referent, the one who is photographed.

It is not surprising that the daguerreotype evoked such a popular response from those who were seeing mirror images of themselves, their loved ones and the portraits of the cultural and political icons of the period. "Uncanny" is the word the daguerreotype evoked then and continues to evoke. The daguerreotype image, removed from its referent and duplicated, although a likeness, was strangely alienated from that original referent, estranged in ways that suggest Freud's explication of the uncanny as the return of the repressed. Adding to the eeriness and novelty of seeing what at least appeared to be an exact likeness of the subject, when the angle of vision shifted, the viewer saw herself engaging in the act of viewing, becoming a viewer of the viewer as well as the referent.

The strange and unfamiliar familiarity, the power of *absence* that exists because the "real time" of the photographic moment disappears as soon as the shutter snaps, the sense of the uncanny that Freud explicates in his papers, *all* of this lingers, despite the ubiquity of the photographic image surrounding us at the beginning of the 21st century, despite the radical changes in technology that now allow for the creation of a "photograph" with no "real" referent, and particularly, I believe, when that lingering uncanniness is embedded in fiction. There it provides immediate "presence" with all its references to the presence of its uncanny absence.

The photograph in the form of the readily available and relatively inexpensive daguerreotype entered into the culture extraordinarily rapidly. Daguerreotypists set up shop in every community. For only a few dollars, everyone could have a "living" image of themselves and of their loved ones. Hawthorne was among the early enthusiasts, frequently visiting the studios of daguerreotypists from as early as 1841, when he was one of the first customers at the studio of Boston's prominent daguerreotypists, Southworth and Hawes (Shloss 38).

The instant popularity and proliferation of the photograph gave painters and writers much cause for reflection. The daguerreotype, popularly understood as a construction of nature seemingly free of human agency and representative of the absolute truth, evoked both fascination and anxiety from artists in terms of their concerns about the truth value of verbal representation and about the ethics of artistic creation. The daguerreotype seemed to represent the truth of reality without requiring human accountability. From his journals, his letters to his beloved Sophia Peabody and by inference from his fiction, we understand Hawthorne to have been shy, reclusive and enormously uneasy about his desire to be the unseen observer who might scrutinize people closely in order to obtain the material he needed for his stories while being both unobserved and emotionally detached from the people and the process. The rhetoric of the daguerreotype now declared that this was not only possible but to be desired.

The photograph newly brought to the attention of artists the ever-present tension between word and image. The photograph came to represent the unvarnished nature-given truth. Could words capture that same unmitigated truth? One of the responses of writers to this new science of image-without-agency was to incorporate the rhetoric and image of the daguerreotype into their fiction. Hawthorne was the first to do this, briefly in his short story "The Birth-Mark" (1843) and most fully in his novel *The House of the Seven Gables*.

The haunted portrait, a portrait that because of its seeming mutability paradoxically linked with its supposed adherence to the absolute truth, prefigures the daguerreotype in fiction, has a lengthy history in 18th- and 19th-century British and American literature. The haunted portrait in literature can be traced from the era of the Gothic novel, first in England, then in America in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) and, much later, in antebellum periodical stories from Poe, Hawthorne and numerous other writers (Williams 69–70).

Hawthorne's short story "The Prophetic Pictures" (1837) presents the painted portraits of a wife and her husband as prescient forecasters of their unhappy fate. The facial expressions and attitudes apparent in their respective portraits do not match their outward, public appearance. The artist in the story knowingly possesses the power of prophecy but stands somewhat aloof from it, leaving the recognition of his prescience to the objects of it. He clearly has creative agency, but steps away from the responsibility of that agency. In response to the wife's dismay at witnessing her expression in the portrait, the painter places the power of his gifts as outside his understanding and control.

> "Madam," said the painter, sadly, taking her hand, and leading her apart, "in both these pictures, I have painted what I saw. The artist—the true artist—must look beneath the exterior. It is his gift—his proudest, but often a melancholy one—to see the inmost soul, and, by a power indefinable even to himself, to make it glow or darken upon the canvas, in glances that express the thought and sentiment of years. Would that I might convince myself of error in the present instance!" (9: 175)

It is difficult not to hear Hawthorne wrestling with his own creative responsibility as a detached observer in those lines, and even more difficult in an earlier bit of narrative in the same story, offering society's critique of the painter's prowess in depicting the inner life: "Some deemed it an offense against the Mosaic law, and even a presumptuous mockery of the Creator, to bring into such existence such lively images of his creatures" (9: 178). In a passage near the close of the story, the painter is described in terms that again suggest a connection with Hawthorne's own anxieties about his writerly detachment.

> Like all other men around whom an engrossing purpose wreathes itself, he was insulated from the mass of human

> kind. He had no aim—no pleasure—no sympathies—but what were ultimately connected with his art. Though gentle in manner, and upright in intent and action, he did not possess kindly feelings; his heart was cold; no living creature could be brought near enough to keep him warm. (9: 178)

At the very end of "The Prophetic Pictures," the artist/painter figure steps into the scene of his predicted violence just as the husband raises his hand to murder his wife.

> The painter seemed to hear the step of Destiny approaching behind him, on its progress towards its victims. A strange thought darted into his mind. Was not his own the form in which that Destiny had embodied itself, and he a chief agent of the coming evil which he had foreshadowed? (9: 181)

Concerns about the ethics of artistic scrutiny and agency, as well as implicit questions about the above-mentioned tensions between hierarchies of word and image are woven into much of Hawthorne's work from as early as his above-noted story. Before examining *The House of the Seven Gables* in some detail, I want to look briefly at two others of his shorter fictional works: "Sights from a Steeple" (1831) and "The Birth-Mark."

His brief sketch "Sights from a Steeple," published before the appearance of the daguerreotype, directly addresses Hawthorne's artistic concern with the ethics of vision. For the duration of this sketch, the artist/writer/narrator sits isolated in a church spire as a storm gathers while he watches several groups of people far below—"a watchman, all-heeding and unheeded" (9: 192). What the narrator fails to tell us is that he is romantically interested in one of the women he is watching. He guesses at her interest in another and watches as she is marched home by her seemingly irate father, but, of course, he can only observe. He cannot act in his own behalf, and is reduced to his wistful ejaculation "O that the multitude of chimneys could speak . . . and betray, in smoky whispers, the secrets of all who . . . have assembled at the hearths within!" (9: 192). The following often-quoted passage, with its references to brightness and shade, again prefigures the daguerreotype, as well as succinctly suggesting Hawthorne's own positioning as unseen seer.

> The most desirable mode of existence might be that of a spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisible round man and woman, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity, and shade from their sorrow, and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself. (9: 192)

"The Birth-Mark," published first in 1843, is the first of Hawthorne's fictions to contain a camera. The photographer/artist, a scientist, distancing himself from his prophetic and "creative" powers with his camera, records a haunted "spirit" photograph of his wife's facial birthmark, a hand-shaped blood-colored *flaw*, as he sees it, in her perfection, and a loathed reminder of her femaleness. After having "fixed" the image of his wife's flawed face on the silver plate of the daguerreotype, this photographer and scientist, with a series of observations and "treatments," effectively "fixes" her death in his attempt to eradicate her birthmark, all in the name of his wish to narcissistically create "earthly perfection" (10: 37). In his one experiment with the camera, the scientist and husband hastily throws away the evidence, but not until his wife has seen the daguerreotype that mysteriously portrays her face as nothing but its imperfection—confirmation of his obsession, validated by nothing less than nature's light.

Hawthorne's novel *The House of the Seven Gables*, published in 1851 at the height of the proliferation and popularity of the daguerreotype, is narratively driven by the rhetoric of photography. As such, the novel provides insights into both of the artistic concerns brought about by the discovery of photography that I cite earlier—questions about the hierarchy of word and image and issues of the ethics of artistic vision.

This novel is inscribed with the discourse of the haunted portrait, both painted and photographed. The painted portrait in its fictional presentation as haunted, as is clear from the earlier discussion of such portraits, easily takes on the rhetoric of the daguerreotype. Susan Williams in *Confounding Images*, her study of photography and portraiture in antebellum American fiction, calls our attention to the beginning of this novel within the first paragraph as image and word merge in a portrait. In fact, image inspires word as the haunted old house with its seven gables is described as portrait, its windows, doors and gables forming a face, giving rise to the *voice* of the ensuing narrative. In this novel, images are living things, not static; they contain narrative.

Word and image converge again in the character of the protagonist, Holgrave, the daguerreotypist who is also a writer, who mesmerizes Phoebe with a story of an ancient lost land deed found hidden behind her family's ancestral portrait. This uncanny ancestral portrait not only represents the long-dead Colonel Pyncheon's visage but also reveals the hidden, suppressed character of its referent, and finally the long-hidden deed itself. Holgrave's presence in the novel points to all of Hawthorne's artistic concerns about vision, observation and power. Standing at a distance, as Hawthorne wished to, Holgrave closely and often secretly observes those who are particularly uncomfortable with such scrutiny. In one of the final chapters of the novel, his camera spies on and records even the dead, his camera presumably recording by the agency of the impassive and nonjudgmental light of the sun.

This is a novel written through the "camera eye," not so much in terms of experience made concrete in frozen frames of stilled vision as we see in Stephen Crane's word versions of Matthew Brady's photographs in *The Red Badge of Courage,* but as a vision through the eye of the camera to the public/private dichotomy of individual presentation, the culturally correct public persona versus the normally veiled spiritual or demonic qualities of personality and character—a dichotomy frequently observed in the then contemporary rhetoric of the daguerreotype. Pose and pretend however they will to present to the public their constructed self, no one may hide the private self from the all-seeing sun.

Five portraits are omnipresent in this novel, mirroring and remirroring, each animate and uncanny; two are painted portraits, three are daguerreotypes.

The first portrait we see, the painting of the Puritan ancestor who begins the legacy of greed, anger, ambition and ruthlessness that has tainted the Pyncheon family for all the succeeding generations, very much in the tradition of the literary haunted portrait, bears the mark of the uncanny. The unstable portrait shifts and alters, depending on the viewer and the occasion. Most observers sense a still-living power in the fierce features of the old Colonel Pyncheon.

> It was considered, moreover, an ugly and ominous circumstance, that Colonel Pyncheon's picture—in obedience, it was said, to a provision of his will—remained affixed to the wall of the room in which he died. Those stern, immitigable features seemed to symbolize an evil influence, and so darkly to mingle the shadow of their presence with the sunshine of the passing hour, that no good thoughts or purposes could ever spring up and blossom there. (2: 21)

Two daguerreotypes of the most recent male heir to the family legacy, Judge Pyncheon, both taken by Holgrave, one of them after the Judge's death, further animate and narrate the story. Both of these daguerreotype portraits assert their own power over their subjects, the copy (daguerreotype) replacing the referent, revealing what the original does not. The first, taken by Holgrave with the Judge's blessing, is intended by its subject to portray a gubernatorial candidate who presumes victory. Phoebe, the Pyncheon country cousin who has come to help out in the ancestral home, is suspicious even before viewing it, revealing one popular opinion of this new technology as unsettling.

> "A daguerreotype likeness, do you mean?" asked Phoebe. . . . "I don't much like pictures of that sort—they are so hard and stern; besides dodging away from the eye, and trying to escape altogether. They are conscious of looking very unamiable, I suppose, and therefore hate to be seen." (2: 91)

Holgrave admits the truth of Phoebe's observation, and attributes the phenomenon to the "wonderful insight in heaven's broad and simple sunshine" to bring out depth of character that even the subject, let alone the operant, may not detect (2: 91). He confesses that he has taken the Judge's photograph a number of times, always obtaining a result that reveals the same disparity between the sitter's actual expression and what appears in the portrait. Just as Hepzibah Pyncheon confuses the ancestral portrait of Colonel Pyncheon with the living judge in an earlier incident in the novel, Phoebe confuses the contemporary daguerreotype of the Judge for the ancient portrait of Colonel Pyncheon.

> "I know the face," she replied, "for its stern eye has been following me about all day. It is my Puritan ancestor, who hangs yonder in the parlor. To be sure, you have found some way of copying the portrait without its black velvet cap and gray beard, and have given him a modern coat and satin cravat, instead of his cloak and band. I don't think him improved by your alterations." (2: 92)

The long-dead Colonel Pyncheon becomes conflated with his heir, the contemporary Judge Pyncheon. Holgrave's daguerreotype, in the way all photographs inevitably are representative always already of death, of stasis, *kills* Judge Pyncheon before his actual death, merging his "hidden" malicious visage with that of his dead progenitor. Their shared and "hidden" vice and malice are revealed, ironically by sunshine doubled—the sunlight that forms the photographic image on the plate in the camera and the sunlight that is a frequent figure in this text for Phoebe Pyncheon.

The other painted portrait in Hawthorne's novel, the porcelain miniature of Clifford, like the portrait of old Colonel Pyncheon, again resembles the daguerreotype in its prescience and its uncanny properties. Clifford Pyncheon, imprisoned as a young man consequent to being falsely set up, as we find out well into the novel, by his cousin, Judge Pyncheon, is deeply mourned for her entire adult life by his unmarried sister, Hepzibah. Hepzibah hides her beloved brother's miniature in the secret and locked drawer of her writing desk, taking it out to gaze upon and weep over in privacy. The portrait, at least as interpreted through Hepzibah's eyes by the narrator, appears to reveal much about the character and temperament of her brother in his youth.

> It is the likeness of a young man, in a silken dressing gown of an old fashion, the soft richness of which is well adapted to the countenance of reverie, with its full, tender lips, and beautiful eyes, that seem to indicate not so much capacity of thought, as gentle and voluptuous emotion. Of the possessor of such features we shall have a right to ask nothing, except that he would take the rude world easily, and make himself happy in it. (2: 31–32)

Here the portrait functions as iconic, imbued with the power to sustain belief. As long as Hepzibah may gaze upon Clifford's miniature, she can believe him to be still present to her, still available for her dogged worship. The miniature further slips into the realm of the uncanny, however, as Hepzibah, in moments of great need or despair, can conjure up Clifford's likeness more fully and with more embellishment without unlocking her secret drawer, as she does on one particular occasion, after looking with distaste on the old Colonel's portrait following an unpleasant encounter with the Judge.

> By the spell of contrast, another portrait rose up before her, painted with more daring flattery than any artist would have ventured upon, but yet so delicately touched that the likeness remained perfect. [The] miniature, though from the same original, was far inferior to Hepzibah's air-drawn picture, at which affection and sorrowful remembrance wrought together. (2: 59)

Living in her fantasy of a lovelier past, Hepzibah lives almost exclusively to dote upon an image as she can no longer dote upon the real. And in the above passage, original is both replicated and rearranged, separated by time and presence to the degree that one might argue as to the existence of an original. Whose portrait does Hepzibah actually possess? This uncanny porcelain miniature and Hepzibah's revision of it reinforce Hawthorne's preoccupation and concern with the uneasy power of imagination, with the tension between image and language, with his fascination with the voyeur, the secret gazer, the one who looks but is not looked upon by what she sees.

More of his fascination with the power of the daguerreotype seems to be revealed in Hawthorne's presentation of the "real" Clifford, the freed Clifford now at last at home in the house of the seven gables, available to the gaze of his family. Clifford is *written* as daguerreotype as his visage shifts and shimmers, seeming to fade in and out of focus and seeming to alter depending on the viewer.

> The expression of his countenance—while, notwithstanding, it had the light of reason in it—seemed to waver, and glimmer, and nearly to die away, and feebly to recover itself again. It was like a flame which we see twinkling among half-extinguished embers; we gaze at it more intently . . . but with a certain impatience, as if it ought either to kindle itself into satisfactory splendor, or be at once extinguished. (2: 104)

This portrait of Clifford speaks to the force of the photographic figure in the construction of this novel. Photographic images permeate and define character in ways that go far beyond descriptive passage. Like an actual daguerreotype, Clifford's visage changes with the angle and slant of observation.

The final portrait/photograph in the novel is that of the now dead Judge Pyncheon, the ancestor who so closely resembles the original Pyncheon, the Colonel, in both appearance and character. Holgrave, alone in the house after Hepzibah has fled in search of the frightened Clifford, comes upon the death scene that has caused Clifford to bolt in terror of being once again falsely accused, and records what he understands immediately to be a natural death, death by the same ancestral ailment that likely killed the Colonel so long ago, and the more modern relative for whose death Clifford wrongly spent a lifetime in jail. This daguerreotype is intended by Holgrave to be documentary proof of both Clifford's innocence and the Judge's guilt in setting him up decades ago.

Phoebe returns unsuspecting from a visit of some days to her own home, to be welcomed by a stern Holgrave at the door and to be shown by him the original daguerreotype of the Judge, the one that she first mistook for his ancient ancestor in modern dress, and then the new one, the daguerreotype he has only just taken of the dead Judge Pyncheon. "'This is death!' shuddered Phoebe, turning very pale. 'Judge Pyncheon dead!'" (2: 302).

This scene, though, is preceded by an entire chapter devoted to the novel's omniscient narrating voice walking us through the many hours of afternoon, evening and night after Judge Pyncheon's death, a narrative camera eye spying on the Judge as his yet undiscovered body sits motionless in a chair in the parlor of the Pyncheon house directly in front of the painted portrait of his ancestor, the Colonel. The Judge sits there stilled throughout the night, viewed by the figurative "camera" of the narrator almost as if he were sitting in the protracted and tedious manner necessitated by the very long exposure required for this 19th-century photographic process. We see him unmoving; we hear his watch, held in his hand, eerily ticking; we watch as the light changes, a storm arises and ceases, the dawn breaks.

We see what resembles an out-of-focus or faultily developed photograph as night deepens:

> Fainter and fainter grows the light. . . . Has it yet vanished? No!—yes!—not quite! And there is still the swarthy whiteness—we shall venture to marry these ill-agreeing words—the swarthy whiteness of Judge Pyncheon's face. The features are all gone: there is only the paleness of them left. And how looks it now? There is no window! There is no face! An infinite, inscrutable blackness has annihilated sight! (2: 276)

There is a moment in this narrative camera's long night's journey when the dead Judge confronts his long-dead ancestor's portrait, image face-to-face with image, both dead, and yet both so alive in their narrative power.

Hawthorne surely knew that a photograph could not be produced without human agency. He surely knew, too, that the popular rhetoric of the daguerreotype as "truth," as an image that could not lie, was just that—rhetoric. The image *gleaned from the sun* is but a representation, manipulated by the photographer, the subject her/himself, the capricious shadows and alterations of light, no more or less truthful than the words Hawthorne chooses to represent the image. Borrowing the then contemporary rhetoric, however, allowed Hawthorne to "spy" as Paul Pry with a greater sense of ease, while his insertion of the object of that rhetoric into this novel gave the rhetorical power of the startling new "magic picture" to his words.

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The Gospel of Martin: King's Messianic Faith

BY STEWART BURNS

Martin Luther King, Jr. was not a saint, as he often confessed. Nor was he Jesus Christ, in either his first coming or his second. The earthly Jesus was sinless, the Gospels tell us. Jesus in his second coming would not have been crucified, as King was.

King did serve as a messiah, at least of his own people, if not of his nation. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had that right. Above all, King became a prophet in the truest sense. He believed that he spoke the word of God, that, like Jesus, he embodied the Word made flesh. Whatever his flaws, whatever his sins, he was a holy man, a spirit person, a shaman, who envisioned and experienced the sacred world.

The first part of this essay explores King's spiritual journey and its legacy. The second part looks into the nature of his faith, and how his faith shaped his moral and political vision.

Like Jews in Jesus' time, African-Americans hungered for a messiah in the post–World War II era to revitalize their messianic mission to redeem themselves and their adopted nation. Black nationalist Marcus Garvey had mesmerized millions in the 1920s, but his hubris and the FBI had brought him down. Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad aspired to the mantle of messiah, but like the Wizard of Oz, he was a small man hiding behind a fake image. Black heroes tried to fill the void—Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, Paul Robeson, Malcolm X. As he said many times, Martin King did not seek the role of messiah, of prophet. His own conscience and the black community forced it upon him.

His father and mother and the black preachers of Atlanta reared him for this role. He might have been surprised by his sudden leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott, but black America was not. He was the one they had been waiting for. King's correspondence during the bus boycott was replete with fellow Baptist ministers anointing him as messiah, as prophet, as Jesus. Preachers introduced him to their congregations as the metaphorical if not actual Christ, "nailed to the cross." Worshippers hailed him as their "little Jesus."

Initially he valued this mythification as useful to achieve his goals. But his bona fide conversion experience of January 1956, at midnight in his kitchen, made it hard from that night on to disentangle his own persona from the Spirit that promised never to leave him alone. Surviving the Harlem stabbing of September 1958 made him a firmer believer in his sacred status and destiny. The more he sacrificed and anguished during the escalating crises of the 1960s, the more he felt filled up by Jesus, his "cosmic companion"—just as the spirituals and gospel songs had sung out for generations, often embarrassing him. By the late 1960s, when he like Lincoln knew that death was near, he believed that he was inhabiting Jesus' spirit, and that the Lord was inhabiting his. He probably did not believe that he was the reincarnation of Christ; only that Christ was alive in him, that they were intimately connected.

Up until he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, he saw himself and was seen by others primarily as a Moses figure leading his people to freedom. During the last three years of his life, the same amount of time that Jesus preached and healed in Palestine, King shifted his persona from Moses to Jesus. In his preaching he had always blended the Hebrew scriptures with the New Testament, but in these climactic years his prophetic voice sounded more like the militant redeemer Christ of Revelation, yet with no less faith in the pacific Sermon on the Mount. In his final months, he self-consciously reenacted the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem and relived Christ's passion as his own. King, who lived within his words, most likely did not know whether his final quest was metaphorical or actual, or both. He had devoted his public ministry to making his metaphors come alive as "eternal diction."

His friend the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, whom King nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967, remarked that the Buddha would reemerge in the future not as an individual but as a community. This was what King came to believe about Jesus.

Neither he himself nor any other individual embodied the second coming of Christ (or the first coming of the Jewish messiah). He represented, as an apostle, the second coming in the form of what he called the "beloved community." King understood his prophetic, messianic role as to help transform all people, starting with African-Americans, then all the poor and disadvantaged, then all of humanity, into a collective messiah, a messianic community writ large. To the extent that he personified Jesus, or Moses, or King David, Amos, Isaiah or Jeremiah, he was spreading out his cosmic self, like poet Walt Whitman, to harbor the multitudes. Metaphor or not, King's own rebirth through crucifixion and martyrdom would usher in a reborn world. Or so his faith—rankled by doubt—tried to make him believe.

The idea that all people potentially not only could identify with but could really share Jesus' divinity of course was not new. This was the meaning of the sacrament of eucharist to those who believed they actually tasted the divine body and blood, but only for an instant (and in most Protestant churches only symbolically). For two millennia Christian mystics had believed that they merged with Jesus in one sense or another. A countertradition of Christian faith arose in the first century C.E. holding that all humans could find within themselves the sacred light that God had created to illuminate the cosmic darkness. They had only to claim it.

King must have known about the Gospel of Thomas and other suppressed writings that were discovered buried in Egypt in 1945 and alongside Israel's Dead Sea in the 1950s. This heretical gospel claimed that although Jesus led the way toward sacralizing the world, his followers were no less sons and daughters of God. Although the Gospel of Thomas was not fully examined until after King's death, his mature theology reflected it to an uncanny degree.

"The Kingdom is inside you, and outside you," Jesus proclaimed to his disciples according to Thomas, echoing the rival Gospel of John. But Thomas took a different turn. "When you come to know yourselves," Jesus continued, "then you will be known, and you will see that it is you who are the children of the living Father.

"If they say to you, 'Where did you come from?' say to them, 'We came from the light.' . . . If they say to you, 'Who are you?' say, 'We are its children, the chosen of the living father.'

"Whoever drinks from my mouth will become as I am," Jesus said, "and I myself will become that person, and the mysteries shall be revealed to him" (Pagels 54–57).

In some ways, these ideas were not so distant from the creeds of Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, Shakers, Pentecostals and many other Protestants who believed in an inner light that connected all children of God amid the satanic darkness. Black and white Baptists' rebirth in conversion meant literally seeing the light, as Paul had been blinded by it on the road to Damascus. Protestant evangelists of the Second Great Awakening called themselves "new lights." (The Italian word for birth literally means "to give to the light.") Gnostic Christians not only saw the divine light within their souls; they embodied it. They not only reflected it; they projected it. It was their being.

King and other black social gospel preachers added something that perhaps had been implied previously. People would not be resurrected as individuals, since the kingdom of God was *already* within us and among us. People would be resurrected as a community of equals. Salvation would mean not that of individual bodies and souls but of the national and global body and soul, a global rebirth, a global new beginning. This new heaven and new earth would be a third creation: the first out of the abyss of cosmic darkness, the second out of the deluge of Noah's flood, the third out of the mass slaughter of the modern era beginning with the American Civil War.

King was probably never a true believer in the traditional Baptist creed; as a boy he shocked his Sunday-school class by denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus. But toward the end of his life he had transmogrified into a born-again Baptist heretic. In all of his preaching he rarely (if ever) talked about saving individual souls or personal immortality—the Baptist bedrock. He always preached about the saving of the soul of black folk, of his nation, of the world—of simultaneous personal and social regeneration. He warned not of physical death but of permanent "psychological death," the death of the collective soul that could be brought about by forces of depersonalization, by internal violence of spirit. He spoke like the transcendentalist that he was.

In fact, his vision of immortality was less Christian than Greco-Roman, Jewish, even Hindu. One achieved immortality not through being personally resurrected—dead is dead—but through one's action, suffering and sacrifice while alive. Giving one's life to one's sacred purpose was the ultimate means of making oneself immortal. We have the potential to live eternally in the cherished memory of future generations, as surely King shall and countless other martyrs of the civil rights revolution. Abraham Lincoln set it out prophetically in his First Inaugural Address:

"The mystic chords of memory," he declared on the eve of the Civil War, "stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

Lincoln delivered his coup de grâce 33 months later on a desolate, blood-soaked battlefield in Pennsylvania:

> The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work that they have thus far so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that the dead shall not have died in vain, that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

King began his sacred mission to save America's soul believing that only he, and not the people he led, spoke the word of God. Leadership always descended from the pulpit to the pews, he insisted, never from the pews up to the pulpit. The first mass meeting of the Montgomery bus protest, December 1955, was the first of many revelations to him that the people he led, in Montgomery, in the South, in the nation and in the world, not only were speaking God's word with their prayers and songs, their hands, their feet, their hearts, their lives, but—no longer invisible— were standing before him as the Word made flesh, the children of divine light. He followed them as much as they followed him.

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Religious faith has always been a two-edged sword, fraught with promise and peril. Nothing in recent times has made the peril sharper than the global duel between the extremist faiths of George W. Bush in the West and that of militant Islamists, epitomized by Al Qaeda and its allies. How, then, did Martin King deploy his faith as a weapon of liberation without being vanquished by it, without sabotaging his values? How did he reconcile faith and compassion?

Hardly ever in world history has someone outside government wielded as much moral and political power as did King. His power lay in his command of nonviolent principles and practice as an alternative to mass violence; in his gift for tapping the latent power of the people he led. His greater power, entwined with these, was his mastery of the power of faith rooted in the prophetic tradition. It was his marriage of Gandhian nonviolence and Judeo-Christian prophecy into a union he liked to call "soul force" that made him probably the most important

American leader of his century. Yet the ultimate worth of his leadership may be found more in its legacy to the future than in leading the civil rights revolution of the mid–20th century.

If the true might of soul force has barely been tested, the mighty stream of prophetic inspiration surely has. It has often overflowed its banks from the time of Moses, when God mythically parted the Red Sea to liberate the Hebrews from slavery, then drowned the pursuing Egyptians. From that primal moment on, prophets both legitimate and illegitimate have moved masses of people to risk and sacrifice by invoking, conjuring or aligning with God's presumed commandments. The prodigious force aroused, whether by King David and his successors, by Jesus, Christian martyrs, the Crusades, the Reformation or by Muhammad and his prophetic progeny both Sunni and Shia, was arguably the driving force of civilization for five thousand years, certainly until the ascendance of capitalism and the Enlightenment. Historian Henry Adams, descendant of two presidents, asserted a century ago that the force of faith (in his mind, faith in a female divinity) was greater than the force of technology. It was a force of much good, and of much ill.

The power of Christian faith, especially the vision of a chosen people with a sacred mission, drove the creation of the American republic, from the Puritan theocracy through the First and Second Great Awakenings and the rise of Protestant evangelism. Lincoln's civil religion of national salvation was powered by his prophetic interpretation of God's will for America's destiny. For many Americans, especially blacks, the Civil War was understood, as Lincoln prophesied, as the scourging of the whole nation for the sin of slavery, and its cleansing atonement.

Black people took the American messianic drive a step further. During and after slavery, they concocted a black social gospel theology that, despite backsliding by church hierarchies, conjured God to liberate them from racial oppression. Under King's reluctant stewardship, the prophetic fire of the black social gospel mobilized millions to the streets during the 1960s.

In the decades since King's death, the power of prophetic faith has been hijacked by forces of the New Right in the United States and by conservative clergy around the world. But progressive evangelists in King's tradition—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, even Buddhist—are striving to make a comeback.

At one time in Western history, the Enlightenment appeared to be as radiant as the force of theistic faith. Could the force of Enlightenment values keep pace with the other side of modernity, that of spiritual evolution? Liberalism in various stripes took hold in the 20th century as the dominant counterweight to fascism and totalitarianism. By the end of the century it seemed to have prevailed in much of the world—though not in the holy lands of the Mideast where monotheism was born.

This was a Pyrrhic victory. Liberalism exhausted itself in its long battle against political and religious absolutism. Pummeled by both left and right during recent decades, the liberal faith in pluralism, tolerance and individual freedom was exposed as a bulwark of inequality, of valuelessness. Particularly in the U.S., the Right seized the high ground of substantive and sacred purpose, throwing liberals on the defensive. Ironically, liberal values underwent a revival in many countries while declining in the United States. At home, liberalism sank so low that in the early 21st century its values were trumpeted in a new American imperium by a right-wing president devoted to the holy grail of the free market. Liberalism by itself was no longer adequate, if it ever was, to guide social progress.

King tried to offer a new faith-based philosophy that remedied the ills of liberalism while preserving its redeeming features. No more an absolutist than a relativist, King nonetheless held fast to moral absolutes, to what was right and wrong as he perceived them (or thought God did)—even while believing in freedom of choice, tolerance of differences and a certain degree of relative truth. He believed sincerely that God was on his side, on the side of the freedom and peace movements. While his ends were fairly fixed, he was flexible about means as long as they did not violate basic nonviolent or democratic principles. He was willing to stretch soul force as far as he could without abandoning its core meaning.

He was indeed a moral warrior for absolute truth and righteousness—but *not* of moral absolutism, which accepted no constraints upon self-defined truth. This was a vital distinction. He was reared in the black social gospel tradition that invoked God's wrath to strike down the evil of slavery and white supremacy, regardless of consequences—the tradition that welcomed the barbaric Civil War as God-sent deliverance.

At the same time, his eagle-eyed double vision allowed him to embrace not just absolute values for chosen peoples but universal values for humankind. Alongside fighting for "black power" in all but name, he strove to empower all people and to free them from depersonalizing forces. Like Lincoln, he preached a civil religion that was grounded in the "amazing universalism" of the Declaration of Independence, but he was willing to take sides to enable the forces of light to overcome the forces of darkness.

Departing from Lincoln, who softened his righteous fire with tender words alone, King's moral absolutes of justice and righteousness were always tempered, in speech and action, by a countervailing moral power of openness, questioning and compassion—a moral sensitivity attuned to the complex and unique circumstances of each person's sacred, unrepeatable being. The escalation of righteous action, he believed, must be matched by an escalation of empathy.

Paradoxically, as activist writer Barbara Deming explained in an article King read just before his death, "We can put *more* pressure on the antagonist for whom we show human concern." It was the caring for his person "*in combination with* stubborn interference with his actions that can give us a very special degree of control. We put upon him two pressures—the pressure of our defiance of him and the pressure of our respect for his life—and it happens that in combination these two pressures are uniquely effective" (Deming qtd. in Burns 398–99). The ethical path can turn into the practical path.

King the master synthesizer was striving to forge a middle passage avoiding the extremes of either moral absolutism or relativism, yet bridging the constructive qualities of each. Unrestrained, a commitment to moral absolutes, such as ending racism, could lead to dehumanizing, perhaps destroying, one's opponents deemed racist. Yet without the motivation of moral absolutes, of absolute ends, and the passion they unleashed, the intolerable status quo would likely remain intolerably static. Civil rights would never have been attained in the American South without the belief that segregation was eternally wrong.

Relativity, such as freedom of speech and conscience, has its absolute value, but it must be tempered by concern for the common good. The rampant relativism of "anything goes" was no less harmful, if it was complicit with complacency, than Godlike certitude. If the ultimate outcome of moral absolutism was nihilism, enshrined forever by 9/11, relativism could lead to collective solipsism, a purposeless mass of isolated Adams with no common ground but their lust for aimless liberty. Many in the Islamic world believe that relativism has run amok in the United States, especially in the realms of popular culture, gender relations and sexuality. They have a point.

Relativity, as Einstein understood, worked only in the context of the whole. In order not to be lost in the mass, individuals must remain connected to one another as their lifeline to the world and the cosmos. The Great Chain of Being was not only historical but eternally present. We are a chain of threads, King said, wrapped up in a single garment of destiny, bundled into an inescapable network of mutuality.

In a world still shaking off its absolutist past, moral relativity—the valuing of difference and diversity as the highest good—is not hard to justify. So one might ask, if moral absolutes are so volatile, so overpowering, why not give them up? Aren't they a throwback to the past, a pillar of bygone ages? The answer is twofold. Postmodernism to the contrary notwithstanding, moral absolutes are going to become *more* pervasive, not less, especially in their religious and technological expressions. King seemed to grasp that computers and robotics might ultimately enforce greater conformity and mental regimentation, for greater numbers of people, than fundamentalist faiths that may finally run their course.

More important, absolute ends have served for millennia as the most powerful engine of social transformation, and most likely will continue to do so. Makers of social change, by and large, have proved most effectual when they have seen themselves as agents of divine will—in the abolition of slavery, for example. If we want to get rid of inequality, injustice, barbarism and environmental holocaust, prophetic faith might still be the most fruitful instrument. But not by faith alone. Faith remains blind without the morning light of compassion.

Martin King was never more of a moral warrior, and never more deeply committed to nonviolence, than when he was approaching the end of his life. He did not see these stances as inconsistent, but as prerequisites for each other. Some claimed that nonviolence died with Dr. King. Quite the contrary. In the United States and around the world, from eastern Europe to the Philippines to South Africa, nonviolent direct action flexed its muscle during the last third of the 20th century. After King's death, the broadened peace movement engaged in exemplary, large-scale nonviolent action that, as President Nixon admitted, forced him to end the Vietnam War. In the 1970s and 1980s, mass nonviolent action reached new heights with campaigns against nuclear energy and weapons, and marches for women's rights and homosexual liberation. Environmental activism and the movement for global justice have carried this tradition into the 21st century.

King was convinced that assertive nonviolent action, soul force, was not only more ethical than violence but more effective, especially in the long term. He did not think that violent methods had ever been truly effective, whether in the Civil War, which left its legacy of wretched white supremacy, in global warfare or in ghetto riots. In six decades since Gandhi "invented" it in 1906 (on September 11, in fact), mass nonviolent action in King's view had proved more successful than six millennia of human violence. This was partly because it did not leave bitterness behind to haunt future generations. It stymied the law of the multiplication of evil, of violence and suffering.

This iron law had to be countered by what I call "King's law": The more that one is committed to absolute ends of right and wrong (for better or for worse), the more one must be committed to nonviolent means, especially the absolute refusal to dehumanize one's adversary. King aspired to create the moral equivalent of civil war, whose just reconciliation would not give lie to Lincoln's malice toward none, charity for all.

King believed that soul force as the synthesis of justice and compassion, of faith and understanding, of social and personal rebirth, was rooted in ancient wisdom but geared to the future of human evolution. Soul force required the fire of faith and moral passion not only to break down the walls of inhumanity but to forge the new person: a free person whose emotional capacity would be as mature as her intellect, whose mental and emotional being, rather than sabotaging each other, would coalesce into a more enlightened creature more truly reflecting the image of God. Soul force would deliver as well the beloved community, knit together by compassionate understanding, heartfelt communication, bonds of human intimacy. But however strong his faith, King had grave concerns about what was to come. He believed that the spring 1968 Poor People's Campaign—he somehow knew it was to be his last—would demonstrate whether creative nonviolent action would prove to be the "dominant instrument of social change" for the future. Or would it be thrust aside by armed struggle on one side and people's anomie and "timid supplication" on the other?

Let us transplant King's anguish onto the uncertain terrain of our new century. Will we inherit a future brokered by self-righteous terrorists, official or unofficial, and by masses of disempowered consumers alienated from the world and their own souls, terrified to their bones?

We who claim the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. must cling to the life raft of nonviolence, in word and deed, in passion and compassion, as determinedly as he did during the last years of his life. The alternative is unspeakable.

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A Window

BY HOWARD NELSON

The man who killed his friend in a hunting accident
has taken to wearing a large wooden cross
on a chain around his neck.
I love the man who said,
"I hear and behold God in every object,
yet understand God not in the least."
And the woman who plays Chopin so beautifully
that the night sits down all around her and listens, who said,
"It's music that brings us closest to God."
And Gerard Manley Hopkins,
God, I love that man's poems,
Who could feel Christ in spring
and the Virgin Mary in the wind
and had language astonishing enough
to make us believe it, too.
We need the word God
because it's easier to say
than "The Great Mystery."
Yet I always feel an affection
for the thoughtful person who says,
with neither pride nor apology,
"I'm not a religious person."
And it's a relief, sometimes, at a memorial service,
like opening a window,
when a son or a daughter or a friend stands up, and says,
"He wasn't a religious person,"
and that's the end of that, and then
talks about the one gone with grief and love.

The Man in the Yard

BY HOWARD NELSON

My father told me once
that when he was about twenty
he had a new girlfriend, and once
they stopped by the house on the way
to somewhere, just a quick stop
to pick something up,
and my grandfather, who wasn't well—
it turned out he had TB and would die
at fifty-two—was sitting in a chair
in the small backyard, my father
knew he was out there, and it crossed
his mind that he should take his girlfriend
out back to meet him, but he
didn't, whether for embarrassment
at the sick, fading man
or just because he was in a hurry
to be off on his date, he didn't
say, but he told the little,
uneventful story anyway, and said
that he had always regretted
not doing that simple, courteous
thing, the sick man sitting in
the sun in the backyard would
have enjoyed meeting her, but
instead he sat out there alone
as they came and left, young
lovers going on a date. He
always regretted it, he said.

BY NICK FLECK

After the end of a certain season
a wild comfort settles upon the lake
and on our rustic camp at its side.
In the evening a fisher hunting
along the shore crosses the pier
where I sit cross-legged; she is
undisturbed by my meditation.
The fork-tailed swallows
skim across the calm face
of the dusky lake drinking
and feeding on the nearly invisible insects.
A few lazy and scarlet-tinted clouds float
overhead and I am reminded of how
the night is a prelude to morning
when again I'll sit beside still waters
on a rock greeting the rising sun.

To Things Left Behind

BY JEFF McRAE

Let's be honest with each other: There is me and all things
left behind when you are gone. Here is the note on the butcher block.

It says: *Tuesday, 2:48 P.M.* Here are the forks and spoons drying
in the dish rack. They tell me to place them in their coffins.

Your shoes frown from opposite ends of the living room
over all things I leave undone. Their oxblood bruise

unbeautiful in your absence. You are the imagination of the shoes.
In the bathroom, my toothbrush, lamp revealing my mouth's

muster of white lies. Here is the mirror. It speaks
in metaphors of the complicated fracture your hair leaves on the tiles.

It tells me you will be back. It tells me you never left.
And the long relief of your clothes, kicked aside, at the foot

of the bed. I switch on the outside light should you appear.
Here is the front door, mask behind which the chorus chants.

Lost in a Mirror:

Dialogue with a Radical Constructivist

BY DAVID KENNETH JOHNSON

Champions of conflicting philosophical theories can at times become so captivated by the merits of their views that rational debate seems all but impossible. Such a rift has evidently emerged between the two epistemological-metaphysical positions featured in this fictional dialogue: radical constructivism (RC) and fallibilistic realism (FR). The contemporary realist sees human thought and language as speculative, hence fallible, means of coming to know the objective features of an external (mind- or language-independent) world. By contrast, radical constructivism (as articulated primarily by the movement's founder, Ernst von Glasersfeld) insists that the exercise of these human capacities necessarily restricts all knowledge to subjective constructs formed in experience. Consequently, realist talk of a world beyond thought or language strikes the constructivist as old-fashioned, intolerant or naive. While attempting to provide an accurate portrait of each perspective, I ultimately resolve the dispute in favor of realism by showing that constructivism tacitly affirms the core assumptions of the (realist) philosophical tradition it hopes to replace.

Fallibilistic Realist (FR): Hello. Nice to see you again.

Radical Constructivist (RC): Hello. Did we meet at the cybernetics conference in Amherst last spring?

FR: Yes. I attended your session on "Representing Objects."

RC: "*Re*-presenting Objects."

FR: Right—of course. As I recall, you made some fairly radical claims about our knowledge of the world.

RC: Well, you're half right. Strictly speaking, the theory of knowledge I favor doesn't make reference at all to the so-called "external world."

FR: And by the "external world" you mean . . .?

RC: The alleged world outside my experience, what traditional theorists usually refer to as mind-independent, objective reality.

FR: Okay. So tell me: How do you account for knowledge without bringing in the world?

RC: As the psychologist Ernst von Glasersfeld argues. . . .

FR: Hold on a second! I thought you weren't going to reference the world outside your experience. Isn't that where von Glasersfeld resides?

RC: May I continue?

FR: Please do. But I hope you'll allow me to revisit the issue of von Glasersfeld's residence a bit later.

RC: Of course. As I see it, von Glasersfeld's epistemological perspective, what he calls radical constructivism [*Radical*], alone overcomes the central failing of the Western philosophical tradition.

FR: Which is?

RC: The perennial conceit of *realism*: the view that our knowledge should or could reflect the features of a world outside the knower. In raising the specter of this one, "true" world, realism proffers the illusion that we can settle all disputes by reference to the way things "really" are.

FR: The idea of an independent or external world certainly is a core assumption of traditional epistemology and metaphysics, though I can't say that it strikes me as illusory. Tell me, if knowledge doesn't reflect the ways things are, what is its purpose?

RC: It tells us "what we can and cannot do" [Glasersfeld "Facts" 438].

FR: I take it that knowing objects in the external world is something we cannot do, on this view?

RC: Since all knowing happens within our experience, knowledge has but one kind of object: conceptual structures that we currently take to be *viable* [bid. 441].

FR: No one would deny the truism that knowing happens within experience; but knowing is always the experience of knowing *something*. And isn't that "something" frequently a fact about the external, extraconceptual world?

RC: Again, you're half right. We can all agree that every act of knowing has an intentional object. But, just as plainly, no object of knowledge exists independently of the act of knowing! So, "what we ordinarily call 'facts' cannot be elements of an observer-independent world but, at best, elements of an observer's experience" [ibid. 438].

FR: Very clever! Your account does seem to capture many of our private experiences, like dreams, headaches and other subjective notions. But let's say I stub my toe on a large rock. A complete description of that experience will mention both experiential items, such as painful sensations, *and* something decidedly nonexperiential—the rock itself. The result is perfectly general and should not surprise us: All theories of knowledge presuppose an ontology, or metaphysics, identifying the domain of objects and relations to which our knowledge claims might apply.

RC: I have no problem defining ontology or even "metaphysics" in that way. Of course, the objects and relations of constructivist ontology will all be internal to our experience.

FR: So a rock is *internal* to my experience?

RC: All we can know or say about rocks, headaches or any other object of knowledge derives from our experience. Or do you imagine that you have some kind of mystical connection to rocks independently of your experience of rocks?

FR: Not at all. Why do you say that?

RC: You suggested that my emphasis on experience fails to account for what we might call an "unexperienced" rock. But surely talk of rocks outside all experience is senseless.

FR: I don't follow.

RC: It's fairly simple. Since *all* thought and language occurs within experience, it makes little sense to think or talk about rocks—or anything, for that matter—outside experience. This notion of an "unexperienced rock" comports with Hilary Putnam's characterization of realism as "the impossible attempt to view the world from nowhere" [28]. The supposed externality or independence of that world would place it forever beyond our ken. A more useless notion I couldn't imagine!

FR: Okay, I see what's happened here. Of course, no *thought of a rock* exists outside all thought or experience.

RC: Exactly.

FR: But *rocks* surely do!

RC: Now I'm lost. Aren't you asking me to think about a rock that, by hypothesis, no one has ever thought about?

FR: No, I wouldn't think of it! The notion of an unexperienced rock is simply a *counterfactual claim* concerning the nature of any particular rock, once perceived or perceivable, as *not* dependent for its existence or nature on our perception or any other human activity. The rocks we are talking about now, for example, might have remained unexperienced rocks had we chosen to direct our attention elsewhere.

RC: That is only slightly less complicated than Kant's elusive "thing-in-itself" [*Critique*].

FR: Despite its alleged complexity, it seems to me that the Kantian notion of "rocks-as-they-exist-in-and-for-themselves" is equivalent, in meaning and extension, to "rocks." Kant notoriously, though self-inconsistently,[1] reduces the external world to an ineffable, propertyless void. Kant's "rocks," unlike the ordinary ones I have in mind, are indeed unknowable.

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[1] On Kant's contradictory metaphysics, see, for example, Ruben ch. 2 and Stove ch. 6.

RC: Perhaps, but it does seem to me that Kant was right about one thing: Knowledge of the world is possible precisely to the degree that we have made it ourselves. Whatever we can know or say about rocks is entirely dependent on our making or doing. To my way of thinking, the "rock itself" is just shorthand for the many ways we have come to coordinate our rock-experiences.

FR: I detect a fatal degree of inconsistency here. Your very statement of the theory seems both to employ and to dismiss external, nonexperiential reality.

RC: How so?

FR: Aren't you trying to convince me—and I assure you that I'm part of the real world—of the truth of these perfectly general claims about knowers and their experiences? You share with Kant, apparently, a taste for contradiction. These perfectly general remarks about knowledge, if true, refer to the world in a way that your theory forbids.[2]

RC: Before this goes any further, I should warn you that I'm not interested in the "Truth" or imposing my view on anyone. I accept my view as a viable account of experience. You are entirely free to adopt for yourself some other view that you find more palatable.

FR: Please don't take offense; I don't mean to be confrontational. Since I share your distaste for "imposing" views on others, let's agree to allow the merits of our respective views, if any should emerge, to "impose" themselves on us.

RC: Agreed.

FR: But did I hear you say that you were not interested in truth? Do you not take your view to be meritorious or true?

RC: I claim only that my theory is a viable account of the world as I experience it, since absolute truth is, as they say in religious circles, for *Him* alone. Take a look at this passage from von Glasersfeld. He captures my point exactly when he writes:

> Lest my sometimes quite passionate way of arguing for constructivism be interpreted as an attempt to insinuate that it and it alone is "right," let me hasten to say that this is not

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[2] On radical constructivism's contradictory metaphysics, see Johnson "Metaphysics" 27–41.

> my intention. I would be contradicting one of the basic principles of my own theory if I were to claim that the constructivist approach provides a true description of an objective state of affairs. As I see it, Radical Constructivism merely provides a different way of thinking and its values will depend mainly on its usefulness in our experiential world and only marginally on what professional philosophers have to say about it. ["Knowing"]

FR: I share your skepticism about absolute truth, at least with respect to empirical matters. But von Glasersfeld's words strike me as dangerously self-serving. The wholesale rejection of truth and objectivity, in a preemptive strike against would-be detractors, amounts to a rejection of the very foundation of rational discourse and thought.

RC: I think I hit a nerve! I don't think von Glasersfeld means to reject philosophy entirely, just the distortions of a small group of critics. What is it that you find so disturbing about this passage, anyway?

FR: As I mentioned a moment ago, you seem to share with Kant a propensity to violate the limits of your own theory. Here we have von Glasersfeld nervously aware that he has done just that. His only recourse now is to embrace the most paradoxical of schemes: to banish any remnants of truth from his very own account of experience!

RC: What's so paradoxical about that?

FR: If von Glasersfeld honestly believes that the world is his construction, then it follows that he takes it to be an objective state of affairs that the world is his construction and, furthermore, that this account of his belief is true.

RC: Maybe that is the case *for* von Glasersfeld within the confines of his experiential world. But that doesn't mean he must take his view to be "True-with-a-capital-T."

FR: Now, that is a worse neologism than anything Kant could imagine! But notice: Von Glasersfeld fails to reserve any role for truth even within his own experience, since he forbids us from drawing the natural conclusion that he thinks *his* beliefs are "right." And to be right is nothing but to be in the grip of a truth-claim—and without any scare quotes or capitalization, I might add.

RC: I'm not surprised that you see things this way. But isn't it rather intolerant to suppose that everyone must share your passion for truth?

FR: You are confusing particular truths with truth *per se*. If I were to say that you should accept as true *my* every belief, then that would indeed be intolerant. My more modest claim is simply that you should be willing to admit that you take *your own* beliefs to be true!

RC: My beliefs may or may not be "true" in your sense of the word.

FR: And what sense is that?

RC: Presuming that I've got things right; or, as Richard Rorty would have it, submitting to the philosophical fantasy that my thoughts or words might infallibly mirror the world as it is. I'm sorry, but it is the height of arrogance to suppose that one's beliefs are true or right in this "realist" sense.

FR: Now *I've* hit a nerve. We are thoroughly fallible creatures, prone to error, exaggeration and wishful thinking. But one cure for these ills is to pursue truth more effectively, not to dismiss it as fantasy. In fact, Rorty is so convincing in part because he defends an obvious truth—that all cognition is active and open to error. He is wrong, however, to suggest that knowledge could never reflect the world as it is in itself. True beliefs, like an accurate map, help us find our way in the world.

RC: When I say this strikes me as right or true, I mean only to remark on the internal coherence of my beliefs, not their supposed correspondence to any external world-in-itself. Since all that I know amounts to a viable map of the world *as I experience it*, the map *is* the territory, in Heinz von Foerster's famous phrase.

FR: Though coherence, like viability, is a promising *indicator* of truth, the very idea of truth or "getting something right" seems to involve some kind of correspondence of a thought with its object, or the map with its territory [Weissman *Debt* and *Hypothesis*]. I'm right to *think* it is raining when, in fact, it *is* raining!

RC: I suppose that will depend on whose map and territory you have in mind. Realism seems to require that we all see the same world in the same way. My fallibilistic constructivism rejects truth claims in favor of a multiplicity of viable worldviews.

FR: Questioning the truthfulness of any particular claim is one thing, rejecting the very notion of truth quite another. The former *is* fallibilism—the idea that many, but not all, of our beliefs could be false. The latter is a variety of global skepticism that is notoriously self-inconsistent.

RC: How is skepticism self-inconsistent? The skeptic simply questions the veracity of our every belief.

FR: Not *every* belief. Skepticism threatens to self-destruct unless some of its claims are taken to be immune from doubt. Failing that, the aspiring global skeptic is caught in a logical trap: He or she must take it to be *true* that all truths are suspect. The quite general result seems to be that without some truths against which to measure falsehoods, or veridical perception against which to measure illusions, the very ideas of fallibility or perceptual illusion make no sense [Bouwsma 141–151]. The wholesale retreat from truth is disingenuous, and certainly not the mark of toleration or fallibility [Russman 94; Johnson 12–13].

RC: If truth plays any role in my theory, it will be limited to subjective qualifications of beliefs formed within experience. Radical constructivism is an ontologically neutral theory of knowing with no metaphysical ambitions at all. To continue Rorty's metaphor, my focus is not on thoughts made "true" by the so-called "real" world but on the reflections in my fallible mirror.

FR: I don't see how we can talk sensibly about reflections independent of mirrors—that is, persons capable of reflecting things—and the things reflected. Will you grant, at the very least, that these reflections could have their source in the external world?

RC: Look, as an agnostic, I simply prefer to remain silent on the issue—if you will only let me!

FR: Are my critical remarks a kind of external constraint on your theorizing?

RC: I'm experiencing your challenges to my theory, that is true. But as with all such constraints, I never can be sure if they are arising from an external other or from within my own experience.

FR: What could it possibly mean to say that *you* might be the author of *my* challenges to your theory?

RC: That my current experience is such that attributing constraints to "others" proves viable.

FR: But, the scare quotes notwithstanding, you are experiencing a constraint?

RC: Yes, I am.

FR: So your constructive activity is not wholly free?

RC: That is the only sensible conclusion. We are never free to construct the world just as we please, since "every individual's abstraction of experiential items is constrained . . . by social interaction" [Glasersfeld "Cognition" 126].

FR: So it is possible that at least some aspect of these constructed yet necessarily constraining "others" emanates from the "real" world?

RC: That is what it means to say that I'm *agnostic* about the nature and existence of that world. These "others" may or may not be external to me. I just don't know.

FR: Tell me, then, how is your modestly skeptical account of knowledge any different, save the proliferation of scare quotes, from the realist position that our thoughts may at times reflect the features of the external world?

RC: I would say only that my knowledge *fits* whatever constraints I have so far experienced.

FR: So "fitness" is synonymous with "viability." They both serve as a kind of replacement for truth as correspondence with the world?

RC: That's right.

FR: So the difference is this: I say that my words may at times correspond to reality, you claim they simply fit.

RC: Yes, but the fitness of my concepts, unlike correspondence, is metaphysically innocent and doesn't say anything positive at all about what my concepts fit into; they either fit or they don't. If they do, I know this one thing to be true—my concepts are viable, they seem to function properly in my experiential world. If they don't fit, I know this other thing to be true—they are not viable.

FR: So to say, for example, that my hand fits into a glove is to say nothing at all about the glove?

RC: The fact that your hand fits into the glove gives us no clue about the glove, except that this "independent ontological obstacle" [Glasersfeld "Exposition" 8] is large enough to accommodate your hand. Generally, to say *A* fits into *B*, that any of my constructs fit the constraints of the world as I experience them, is to make no positive assertions about *B*.

FR: It most certainly does, and by your own account! Fitness is a relational property that of necessity refers to two equally indispensable things—my hand and the glove. To say "*A* fits into *B*" is to say that *B* is distinct from and larger than *A*, identifying at once some subset of the objective spatiotemporal relations obtaining between *A* and *B*. Generally, attending solely to *A* in "*A* fits into *B*" is tantamount to asserting *A*; and "my hand fits into this glove" is, obviously enough, not equivalent to "my hand."

RC: You must admit, though, that saying "my hand fits into this glove" says very little indeed about the glove. It may be snug or infinitely large, or possess any number of other properties besides those entailed by the modest claim that my hand fits into it.

FR: Yes. Minimally, "*A* fits into *B*" entails only that "there exists at least one thing larger than and independent of my hand." But that claim amounts to the belief that at least one thing exists independently of my experience. And given that one thing exists independently of my experience, it follows that it is a necessary truth that the external world exists. Your account of fitness accomplishes what you previously thought impossible—it proves realism about the external world!

RC: But you forget, once again, that mine is a theory of knowing, not being. The former doesn't, except perhaps in the minimally realist fashion implied by the notion of fitness, say anything at all about metaphysics or being.

FR: So unqualified ontological agnosticism is no longer your position?

RC: I qualify my agnosticism only so far as the notion of fitness requires. Otherwise, my view still resists realist talk about a world beyond thought or language.

FR: So, despite some resistance, you do affirm the existence of at least some small part of the external world?

RC: I affirm only the bare possibility; and I do so only because I have some sympathy for poetry.

FR: I'm sorry; now you've lost me.

RC: We can never be *certain* to have accessed reality, even when talking about fitness. So the possibility you so desperately want me to entertain—that our thoughts or words reach out to grasp something of this elusive, "real" world—must be extrarational. Though potentially meaningful in some other context, these ideas are best left to poets and mystics.

FR: Fallibilistic realism does not require certain, or absolute, access to the world. Your account of fitness as entailing the possibility of mind-independent constraints, though modest, is sufficient to establish your view as a species of metaphysical realism.

RC: That's quite a leap. I have admitted only the *possibility* of some sort of mind-independent constraints. Realism immodestly assumes what can never be confirmed: the existence of a ready-made and singular universe.

FR: The hypothesis that we are cognizing creatures who attempt fallibly to access the features of a larger, impersonal, constraining natural realm of determinate though perhaps evolving objects and relations, a view ineliminable from the greater part of science and common sense, is perhaps the most well-founded and confirmed hypothesis humans have ever constructed!

RC: *Hypothesizing* the so-called external world to account for the undeniable constraints on our thinking and acting *is* a convenient fiction. But, to explain what amount to apparent regularities of experience, we need only embrace an "as-if" ontology that permits talk of a world that often appears *as if* it exists external to our knowing. You confuse the making of a hypothesis with positing a fiction.

FR: The mark of the fictional, in literature and metaphysics, is its unreality or essential dependence on mind. The role of fitness, in contrast, is to explain the apparently extrasubjective constraints on our thinking and acting. We have but two choices: Assume that some of these constraints exist in the external world or deny that they do. To say that we experience these constraints "as if" they emanate from the world, however interesting as an additional reflection on our experience, is entirely irrelevant to the question of whether or not they are our constructions. How we answer this question determines whether we are realists or solipsists.

RC: I think you've succeeded only in twisting my words. My constructivism is radical precisely because it gives up the traditional philosophical hope of capturing *exactly* the nature of the world. This view, in sharp contrast to the pretensions of realism, fully accepts the inherent fallibility of human knowers.

FR: Did you not condemn realist uncertainty about the external world as insecure?

RC: I did.

FR: Are we to conclude that realism is unacceptable because fallible, yet constructivism viable because fallible? You cannot have it both ways.

RC: I won't deny that you have succeeded in constructing a consistent, if somewhat old-fashioned, epistemological story. I simply offer a contemporary narrative account that prioritizes our active participation in the creation of a multiplicity of viable worldviews. Why deny me, and others, the freedom to construct our own worlds?

FR: Talk of constructing worlds, like Nelson Goodman's infamous claims to have made every feature of the stars, derives whatever initial plausibility it has from a persistent equivocation on the independence of things we don't make, such as worlds, from our knowledge of things we do make, such as worldviews. Aside from concepts, contracts, musical scores and the like, unqualified talk of making the objects of our theories within experience is, frankly, nonsensical.

RC: It's fairly offensive that, after all this time, you can express such little sympathy for my view.

FR: I admit that there are times when experiencing is a kind of making, as hearing a joke or tripping in the dark creates in me a certain sensation. All the rest of experience is simply a way of thinking or talking about matters that are discovered, not made [Weissman *Hypothesis* ch. 1]. We are free to decide that "rock" is a name for some particular bundle of properties and relations. We can decide, too, which categories to place these bundles into—"solid things," "inanimate things," and so on. But the properties we discover in rocks, not those we invent or construct, determine when we can sensibly say of some other thing that it, too, is a rock or belongs in the same or a similar category. In general, though we are free to describe the world in whatever fashion we choose, we are not free to decide what we might find there [Devitt].

RC: Given our very different assumptions about knowledge and the world, I think we would do better to focus not on the failures of the other but on understanding our differences. Constructivism will always prefer discussion to demolition.

FR: Let me see if I've got this right: Your pluralist and tolerant constructivism contrasts sharply with the intolerant dogma that is realism—a position you variously describe as "conceited," "mystical," "useless," "illusory," "naive," "pretentious," "impossible" and "irrational"! Despite your professed preference for discussion over impolite attempts to disprove the other, your rejection of my position has been no less forceful and seemingly dogmatic than, perhaps, some of my criticisms of constructivism.

RC: Mine is most assuredly not some veiled defense of dogmatic "truth." In fact, I've been explicit: Given the undeniable gap between what we think of the world and the way the world is, constructivism fallibly and modestly limits knowledge claims to the former.

FR: Realism, not constructivism, fallibly bridges the gap. Constructivism sees the gap, and in its demand for certainty retreats to the relative security of mind. This one important lesson seems lost on constructivists of a radical stripe: If, like Descartes, we set out from the radically nonnatural assumption of a lone knower somehow ontologically detached from the ordinary world of rocks, trees and other people, knowledge of that world will forever remain elusive or mysterious.

RC: Maybe I prefer that mystery to your one-size-fits-all, God's-eye view of the world. We would all benefit from a healthy dose of humility when it comes to making claims about a world that supposedly rests beyond the experiential interface.

FR: This charge rests squarely on the illusion I just described—the Cartesian idea that we could theorize about the world from "nowhere," or do epistemology in an ontological vacuum. Small wonder that the world-spinning narratives of constructivists often seem preferable to Descartes' lonely existence! But these two are not our only options. Fallibilistic realism represents this other, thoroughly naturalistic, approach: See ourselves, our minds and our very capacity to speculate fallibly about our place in the world as simply another aspect of the knowable, determinate, mind-independent world itself.

RC: My world-spinning narratives, as you say, at least don't try to exceed the bounds of what is rationally available to knowers in the fashion of realism.

FR: Do you forget now your earlier admission that "fitness" requires affirming some small portion of that world? Your fallibilistic realism is there for all to see. This is fairly unremarkable, for how could it be otherwise? How could a theory of knowledge, in contrast to the fantastic proposals of a solipsist, fail to locate itself in our common world?

RC: Your constant references to solipsism simply confirm my suspicion that you fail to understand my position.

FR: I think it time to revisit, as promised, my initial reaction to your use of von Glasersfeld's words in defense of radical constructivism.

RC: Be my guest. But this will have to be the final chapter of our discussion.

FR: You began with the claim that your theory of knowledge doesn't make any reference to the world at all. Is that not true?

RC: That's true. And I am willing to concede now that it does, but ever so slightly.

FR: I argued earlier that the existence of one external thing proves realism.

RC: A pretty minimal version, as I said.

FR: Is it a minimal ontology that includes billions of entities?

RC: I wouldn't imagine that it is.

FR: There's nothing minimal about your account, for it makes explicit reference to billions of autonomously existing entities—all knowers.

RC: That doesn't sound right.

FR: Let me explain. You set out to show that you could make sense of knowledge without making any reference to things or relations that exist externally to your own subjective, constructive activity. It follows that you cannot, by your own lights, make even the slightest reference, however provisional or indeterminate, to *one other* independently existing person. Yet you have done this throughout our conversation; in fact, the very having of a conversation seems to imply it.

RC: I know how to fix that!

FR: I'm just about done. Your very first claim was that constructivism overcomes the basic conceit of realism by denying that "we can settle all disputes by reference to the way things 'really' are." The fatal error occurs as you say "we . . ." and I can stop right there. This one little word is all I need to hear to know, beyond any doubt at all, that you will not be able to live up to your own radicalism.[3] The use of this plural pronoun lends an air of plausibility to your theory, but at the price of breaking its original promise to avoid all references to the world, since "we" refers without qualification to *every cognizing being on the planet.*

RC: You are entirely free to reject my invitation to consider a constructivist alternative to your realism.

FR: Sorry, but you cannot, again by your own lights, extend an indirect if polite invitation for us to give the theory a try, since the very making of an invitation presupposes the existence of at least one other person to whom that invitation is directed. It would seem more appropriate for the consistently radical constructivist to fall silent upon recognizing the solipsistic implications of his or her view.

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[3] Stove dubs this error, common to all versions of subjective idealism, the "pronoun problem."

RC: I now wish that I had. You pretend to derive all of this simply from my admission that the world may at times serve as a constraint on our experience?

FR: The idea that *the world may constrain our experience* implies access to both knowers everywhere and the external world. There could be no plainer statement of realism. So in this modest yet undeniably realist way, constructivism exits the mirror at the price of confounding its sole reason for imagining itself a radical alternative to more traditional epistemology. The only viable account of our constructive activity seems to be fallibilistic realism. It's yours for the taking.

RC: Thanks just the same. Frankly, I favor my experiential world, in all its self-inconsistent glory, to your consistently oppressive "demands for obedience" [Meturana 29] to the "truth."

FR: You mistake my passion for the truth for the demands the world places on us all, including the demands of reason.

RC: A collection of demands nonetheless.

FR: I suppose that is true.

RC: Good-bye[4]

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[4] I would like to thank Kathleen Johnson, Matt Silliman and Paul Nnodim for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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Sartre and *The Sopranos*: Italian-American Identity in the Media and Real Life

BY SHERILYN SAPORITO

America is sometimes considered a melting pot—a place where different cultures blend together to form one monolithic way of life. However, there are many cultural groups living outside the stereotypical American landscape. Whether by habit, choice or forcible exclusion, these groups must live in two cultures simultaneously. This can create some serious problems for hyphenated Americans as they search for their identity. For example, Italian-Americans are no longer Italian and not fully American. As generations are born from the original immigrants, they become more and more American, forcing the group (or the individual) to make a choice to either become agents for preserving their cultural heritage or risk losing it to the melting pot.

In 1948, Jean-Paul Sartre attempted to explain the relationship between the anti-Semite and the Jew, and while doing so, he raised some critical points about ethnic identity and the construction of the "other" that apply to Italian-Americans. Sartre writes that our identity and knowledge of the self are shaped by how we see ourselves and how other people see us, and these two conditions cannot be separated.

In *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre says, "[T]he nature of *my* body refers me to the existence of others and to my being-for-others. I discover with it for human reality another mode of existence as fundamental as being-for-itself, and this I shall call being-for-others. If I want to describe in an exhaustive manner the relation of man to being, I must now attempt the study of this new structure of my being—the 'For-others'" (298).

Associated with being-for-others are important issues such as pride and shame. Pride and shame stem from our relationship with the world. When we have an ethnic identity—when we know we are different—the images of us put forth by the world will have a strong impact on cultural pride. These images, whether true or false, will bind a group together as they respond to these messages.

Sartre writes that the people who are the most responsible for stigma and racism are the people who create racist ideology, not the stigmatized group itself. Thus, the problem is not a Jewish problem, a black problem or a woman problem, it is the problem of the anti-Semite or the racist or the misogynist. Unfortunately, because the stigma creator is operating a priori, he/she escapes reason, and therefore personal responsibility, which increases the challenges the stigmatized group faces while defending themselves (*Anti-Semite* 13).

Sartre observes two typical responses, or modes of defense, of the stigmatized: authentic identity (i.e., in the case of anti-Semitism, the authentic Jew) and inauthentic identity (inauthentic Jew). Inauthentic Jews react to the anti-Semite and exhibit what are perhaps the most pernicious consequences of stigma; they see themselves through the lens of the other. They are self-monitoring, self-hating, and they distance themselves from all Jewishness (*Anti-Semite* 91). Authentic Jews recognize the social forces that surround them, and they understand themselves despite these forces, which allow them to shape their own identity. "Thus the authentic Jew is one who asserts his claim in the face of the disdain shown to him" (*Anti-Semite* 90). Sartre sees the authentic Jew as being the reasonable character even though the path of authenticity is a more challenging, but ultimately more rewarding, one.

Sartre's model of the stigmatizers and the reaction to their messages by the stigmatized can be applied to Italian-Americans as well as to Jews. In order to pass on an authentic group identity to new generations, Italians, and other ethnic groups, have to battle against inauthentic myths and stereotypes told about them by the larger society, which are often louder than the stories that they, the subgroups, are trying to tell. Although there are no vocal groups who seek to deny Italian-Americans rights, or who discriminate openly against them as the anti-Semite does the Jew, a look at the myths being told about Italian-Americans by the mainstream media (i.e., Hollywood, television and commercials) reveals that Italians are still a marked group.

As Bernard Beck explains, because of the immense size, makeup and populations of America, popular culture has become our only vehicle for a shared, national community. This has become truer as the structure of urban and suburban American life strips local communities away from us. We look to popular culture to get knowledge from, and feel included in, a larger society, and we look to television and film's "hyperreality" to take us away from the isolation of daily life. Because of this isolation and dependence on popular culture, "our images and understandings of immigrants, or subcultures, and of the human nature of diverse peoples are heavily influenced by what we receive through that culture" (Beck 3). In addition, pop culture plays another important role in identity construction, as Brian L. Ott explains: The culture industry, and television in particular, performs two functions with regard to identity formation today. First, television furnishes consumers with explicit identity models, models not of who to be but of how to be. Viewers learn to fashion their identities by watching popular characters fashion theirs (Kellner 238–47). Second, television furnishes consumers with the symbolic resources—the actual cultural bricks—with which to (re)construct identity (Ott 58).

Unfortunately, popular culture operates on a circular paradigm: It offers a model to American consumers; if consumers accept it, the popular-culture machine will continue to use this model and will only offer variations on the original theme. Such is the case with the Italian-American models offered by corporate media. It is a model from history (the uneducated immigrant, the gangster, the isolated Italian communities) that has its roots in authenticity, but it is an old story that has yet to be revised and updated for the 21st century.

The gangster story is the most common model, or myth, used in stories about Italian-Americans. Movies such as *Scarface* (1932), *The Godfather* (1972), *GoodFellas* (1990) and, most recently, the cable-television series *The Sopranos* (1998) tell stories based on variations of the themes of crime, family loyalty, personal honor and linguine with clam sauce. Because they are entertaining, and because they include some authentic myths in their narration, these stories are accepted by the American public; and because of the nature of popular culture, it is impossible for other stories of Italian-Americans to break through the confines of this model.

One of the most perturbing aspects of the gangster genre is the prevalence of Italian-Americans in its constructions. The writers, directors and actors in the canon of gangster movies are largely Italian-Americans: Scorsese, Coppola, De Niro, Pacino, Sciorra, Gandolfini and Falco. Beck attributes this phenomenon to the significance this myth plays in the construction of Italian-American identity. He writes:

> The growing interest in exploring the Italian character of organized crime that these film artists demonstrate is evidence of its deep meaning to Italian Americans, to their sense of identity, and to the unresolved issues this community faces in negotiating its role in American society. . . . These are not the concerns imposed on this culturally embattled ethnic group by a mainstream culture that is derogatory and repressive. They are the concerns raised from within that community by its most accomplished children. (3)

Richard Gambino, echoing Sartre, does not agree with Beck's conclusions. Italian-American participation in the perpetuation of the gangster stereotype is a symptom of inauthentic identity, not a search for it. It is true that there are some valid qualities of Italian-American life in Mafia movies, but this is because, generally, myths are rooted in some truth. What separates an authentic myth from an inauthentic myth is the amount of the lived experience found within them (Gambino "Crisis" 273). There is little harm caused by isolated individual inauthentic myths—one *Godfather* movie will not cause an Italian identity crisis; however, the harm, and the crisis, comes when there are only inauthentic myths being told—when you cannot find an example from popular culture that does not show only Italian-American stereotypes. Because their understanding of themselves comes from the larger society, as described earlier, the misrepresentations of Italian-Americans in popular culture can cause them to accept the false myth. They use the "cultural bricks" offered by these false myths and media images to build their identity. Not only are Italians constructing their identity based on unlived false experiences but they are also agents in perpetuating (and giving false validity to) these stories. "Self-understandings and self-expressions produced in this mode by the group's members reinforce the less authentic myths, inspiring more belief in them and inspiring the production of more art in the same vein" (Gambino "Crisis" 274). In response to Beck, movies about gangsters *cause* "movies about gangsters to turn out to be movies about being Italian."

It is unfair to say that a handful of Hollywood artists are Italian-Americans' "most accomplished children." Italians have successes in every aspect of American life, from the arts to sports to politics to business. Beck should not place responsibility solely on the shoulders of Italians, for as Sartre wrote of the anti-Semite and the Jew, it is the problem of the stigmatizer, not the stigmatized, and the available options of the stigmatized are to assume either an authentic identity or an inauthentic identity (*Anti-Semite* 13). Popular culture is mostly created from and by inauthentic identity. Scorsese, Coppola and De Niro have made careers from creating imaginary worlds of dons and hit men. They do not do it to defame their heritage; they do it because it was their vehicle to success, to their paychecks. Yet it has had serious consequences.

A Princeton-based Response Analysis Corporation poll found that 74 percent of adult Americans believe that most Italian-Americans have some connection to organized crime, yet the U.S. Department of Justice estimates that fewer than .0025 percent of the 26 million Italian-Americans are involved in organized crime (OSIA 1). This is a very real effect of popular culture's circularity and of its role in modern Americans' identity construction. If Italian-Americans want to be successful in this culture, it is a lot easier for them to take the easy way out and assume inauthentic identity, either by denying their heritage or by buying into the inauthentic myth. Unfortunately, because the Mafia image is so present and has been incorporated so thickly into American popular culture, reasoning with facts and figures does nothing to displace this myth. In fact, some Italians have become so defensive that they are denying that the Mafia exists (Gambino *Blood* 283). This is creating another form of inauthentic identity, one based on as many self-deceptions as inauthenticity caused by an embracing of the Mafia myth.

As harmful to Italian-American identity as the Mafia image is, there are other, subtler, but still false and inauthentic, messages coming from the media about Italian-Americans. The following is an analysis of one of these movies. Exemplifying these less obvious Italian-American stereotypes is the 1993 romantic comedy *Mr. Wonderful*, directed by Anthony Minghella, starring Matt Dillon and Annabella Sciorra. Set in the early 1990s, *Mr. Wonderful* tells the story of Gus and Leonora (Lee), two Italian-Americans from "the neighborhood." Gus and Lee are divorced, but Gus reenters Lee's life because he cannot afford to pay her alimony. He tries to find her a new husband to free his commitment to her and, in the process, Gus and Lee fall back in love. The plot sounds innocent enough, but because Gus and Lee are Italian-Americans, subtle stereotypes hide among the plot points and dialogue.

Leonora is trying to escape her Italian identity through education. This implies that Italians are uneducated and ignorant and have something worth escaping. She has assumed what Sartre would call an inauthentic identity. She sees herself being-for-others, and through leaving the neighborhood and going to college, she is escaping her working-class Italianness.

"You're still a guinea!" Gus shouts to Leonora as she returns to school. This contrast between working-class Italians and the educated is one of the most deep-seated inauthentic myths told about Italians: An Italian-American will lose his/her ethnicity if educated; he/she cannot be Italian and professional simultaneously. Italian-Americans must resort to organized crime or restaurant ownership to make a living, because they do not see education as valuable. In a sense, this myth denies Italian-Americans the American part of their identity. They cannot take part in the American dream because they lack the motivation to promote themselves within the system. They either resort to crime or are complacent staying at the bottom rung of the class system. In *Mr. Wonderful,* Gus and his friends work at Con-Edison—they're electrical workers, not managers. They are constantly trying to come up with money through get-rich schemes, such as buying a bunch of frozen turkeys and selling them on the street for a profit. Eventually, they come across a dilapidated bowling alley and decide that their way to riches is through fixing it up. While there is no shame in owning a bowling alley or being an electrical worker, the movie connects these nonprofessional jobs as an essential part of the characters' Italian-American identity, and it juxtaposes this to the non-Italians in the movie (or WASPS, since some of Gus's friends are black and Mexican) who are all professionals and/or educated.

This inauthentic myth ignores the fact that some of the world's most successful people have been Italian, including, but not limited to: A. Bartlett Giamatti, the youngest president of Yale University in 200 years; Generoso Pope, who worked his way from a railroad worker to one of the Forbes 400 richest people; and Amadeo Pietro Giannini, founder of Bank of America. According to a report from the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA), taken from data from the 2000 U.S. Census, 48 percent of Italian-Americans have either a high school or a college diploma, compared with 44 percent of the general population; and the average Italian-American family has a median annual income of $61,300, compared with the national median income of $43,162. The data shown are not consistent with the corporate media's vision of Italian-Americans as an uneducated, working-class ethnic group.

Another inauthentic myth told in *Mr. Wonderful* is about Italian women. The women in the movie are overemotional, dramatic, superstitious and money hungry. At one point in the film, Gus says to his friend during a conversation about women, "Don't go out with Italian girls, they're killers, I told you this. Check her out, start saying a Hail Mary and see if she moves her lips." Later, in another scene of just women, Gus's non-Italian girlfriend takes advice on how to make Gus commit to her from an older Italian wife. "I've still got wedding cake under my pillow; we've been happy 28 years." Of course, these stereotypes are just that, stereotypes, but the movie does not portray these characteristics as belonging just to the characters in the movie; instead, they seem to speak for all Italian-American women. Gus says, "Don't go out with Italian girls," meaning all and any Italian girls.

Inherent in Sartre's description of being-for-others is the acknowledgment that the "others" have not formed their opinions about the world through personal experience alone. When being-for-others, not only do we have to justify our own identity but we also have to justify the way our kind is portrayed in the world. Gus had one bad experience, that we know of, with an Italian woman, yet he condemns them all. This message is not recanted when he and Lee get back together; it is almost as if he still loves her even though she is Italian. Viewers of this movie will not come away from it thinking positive things about Italian-American women.

While Gus and Lee get back together, and Gus becomes a partner in the new bowling alley, none of the themes of the characters' Italian-American identity are resolved. Gus's social status does not change significantly, and he never withdraws the remarks he made to Lee about her escaping her ethnic identity through education. No attempt, by Gus or Lee, is made to overcome Gus's remarks about Italian-American women. The unfortunate thing about this movie is that it represents one of the few non-Mafia messages being told about Italian-Americans, and because it is a romantic comedy, that "happens to be about Italians," it is perhaps more harmful in its veiled state. Why is it that we see only these versions of Italian life—when they are not even typical of reality? Where are the other representations?

Nancy Savoca, an Italian-American filmmaker, recorded one of these other representations of Italian ethnicity in her first film, *True Love* (1989). *True Love* explores the event of a wedding through the lens of Italian-Americans. It follows the couple, Donna and Michael, from the planning stages of their wedding to the ceremony itself. It is not a plot filled with suspense: Will they get married or won't they? What major comic event will befuddle their plans? Instead, the film looks at how each character sees the marriage institution from inside the Italian-American world. There are no references to the Mafia, food is not a character, and there are no references to the "home country." These are the Italian-Americans outside the myth, imperfect and struggling to make sense of their world, just like everybody else.

True Love is a breakout from the Italian-American stereotype used by popular culture. It is also a breakout from the pop-culture paradigm of accepted myth and variations of it, so much so that when the film came out, reviewers tried to squeeze it into familiar parameters, comparing it with movies such as *Mean Streets, Married to the Mob, Moonstruck* and other ethnic comedies (Giunta 1). The only thing these movies have in common is that they are about Italian-Americans. This blindness to the fact that Savoca made an antistereotypical film only proves the way in which stereotypes have infiltrated popular culture. Savoca also had trouble financing her movie. "People kept saying 'Oh, this is an Italian movie,'" she told *The New York Times*. People considered it an ethnic movie, one that would not draw the crowds like the popular Italian Mafia films (Steinhauer 1).

Italian-Americans are caught in a struggle involving their culture—with its traditions and norms—American culture—with its traditions and norms—and the way American culture views theirs. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these three aspects of an Italian's identity are internalized and play a role in his/her self-understanding. We can see this struggle in Donna's character. Donna is engaged to Michael, a boy from the neighborhood whom, we assume, she has been dating for a while. There is no talk of how or why they decided to get married, but it seems as if they are doing it because of other people's expectations of them. It is clear that neither one of them feels the other is a "soul mate," "the only one," or any other notion of American romantic love. Instead, they get married because it is time. At one point, after a fight with Michael, Donna questions whether or not she should go through with the wedding. She says if she ended it now, she would have to leave, move upstate, "I couldn't stay here." "The thick web of social roles that envelopes the Italian-American community makes it impossible for the characters to articulate a narrative desire not legitimized by the community itself" (Giunta 4). Donna feels she must live by her community's cultural norms, yet these traditions and ways of life do not have the meaning for her that they do for her parents and the older generations. She is tempted to break these traditions, and does, such as meeting with Michael the night before their wedding. Another female character in the movie, one of Donna's friends, is a single mother of a 12-year-old girl. After being offered marriage by a man she is "seeing," she turns him down, saying, "I don't need any favors. . . . I need to do this on my own." Again, we see the breakdown of traditions because they have lost their meaning and social value for the younger generations.

While she avoided Italian-American stereotypes, Savoca did not give us an example of an authentic Italian character (in the Sartre sense of authenticity) that is comfortable with her ethnicity and its place in the American landscape. Instead, she gave us Donna, who in a legitimate way has an inauthentic identity. *True Love* gives Italian-Americans a real representation of themselves. It shows, as Richard Gambino describes, "a search for identity that is crippled by a lack of knowledge of cultural roots and a resulting absence of appreciation of the unique dynamics of one's own psychology" (*Blood* 161). Yet, while this is not its purpose, it does nothing to fill the void of authentic Italian characters in popular culture.

There is an authentic Italian culture, with clear values, traditions and customs, but one is not going to find it at the movies. Unfortunately, because of the way American and popular culture work (emphasizing the individual and grouping "others" into stereotypical roles), Italian culture is fading away except among authentic Italians. Yet, even then, because of being-for-others, the pop-culture myth is threatening Italian identity. Italian-Americans live their lives knowing who they are and knowing how the world sees them. This double consciousness adds to the burden of achieving authentic identity. It is hard to make sense of oneself when the world is constantly telling you you are something you are not.

I grew up in a small Massachusetts town, 200 miles from my closest family members. My father, who is second-generation Sicilian, and my mother, of mixed, mostly northern European background, raised my brother and me as American children, which is what we were. It was my grandmother who instilled in me my Italian identity. When I was growing up, she used to say, "You are fifty percent Italian and fifty percent minestrone soup," but I did not know what being Italian meant. I had only my grandparents as models, and to me they were just typical old people. It was at large family gatherings, such as the weddings that took place a couple of times a year, that I realized my family was different from my friends' families. Yet I still did not know how to make sense of it, until I saw *The Godfather*. I recognized parts of my family in that movie: the way the characters talked, the way the houses looked, the food they prepared. *The Godfather* was my link to a family that I knew I was a part of but that was not a part of my daily life. I took everything in that movie as truth, and went as far as to assign the gangster aspects to my own family, even though I knew Franco was actually a doctor and Uncle Gallo was a shoe-store owner. When I was leaving for the Bronx to attend a wedding, a funeral or a baptism, I would try to explain to my friends what it was like to be a Saporito. "You know the opening scene in *The Godfather*, the big wedding, well, that's exactly what my family is like." Even today, as enlightened as I am about the Mafia myth, it is still my best example of a typical family event. This only proves the power of the Hollywood mythmaking machine. It confuses and blinds people in its seduction. It makes it nearly impossible to separate fact from fantasy. On the quest for identity, these movies only hinder one's search.

So far, this article has mostly addressed Italians living in an Italian community, in which achieving authentic identity is a slightly easier task. Since ethnicity is based on group membership, a community provides most of ethnicity's benefits, such as support, examples of being and education. These Italians have some tools available for fighting false myths and, because they have an available community, they are not as threatened by inauthentic identity as Italians living in ethnic isolation. However, with suburbanization and exogamous migration, these Italian communities are rare. Some towns and cities have chapters of OSIA or Italian-American clubs, but it is mostly the older generations who frequent them. Therefore, the problem of Italian identity lies not in a battle between a strong minority group and media culture; rather, it is an individual struggle to recognize and understand what being Italian means in America today. This task is made more difficult by the media's images of inauthenticity.

In 1973, Richard Gambino asked a group of Italian-American students five questions:

1. Do you instinctively think of yourself as Italian, American or Italian-American?
2. Have you ever felt conflict between the Italian part of you and American demands on your nature?
3. What particular insights, nerve endings, advantages, do you have from your Italian background?
4. If there is one thing that you think you are as an Italian-American that you do not share with others, what is it?
5. Name some Italian-Americans of whom you are privately most proud. (Blood 321)

The students affirmatively identified themselves as being Italian, but they did not answer the four other questions, saying they were "too complicated." Gambino interpreted this, and the students agreed, to mean that the questions were complicated because Italians had a deep identity problem.

While it could be debated that Italians are at a disadvantage because other groups have a strong ethnic identity, there have been studies that show there are positive effects of ethnic self-identification. In 1997, Ruben Martinez and Richard Dukes investigated the effects of ethnic identity on the social conditions of adolescents in six school districts throughout Colorado. They found that ethnic identity plays a large role in determining global self-esteem, academic confidence and purpose in life (Martinez 503). In a separate study, Jean Phinney found that "those adolescents who have explored ethnicity as a factor in their lives and are clear about the meaning of their ethnicity are likely to show better overall adjustment than those who have not considered their ethnicity or are unclear about it" (7). The modern researcher concurs with what Sartre philosophized 50 years earlier: Authentic identity is necessary.

Young Italians who feel no connection to their heritage are not to blame. Group identification is not something one can find in isolation. It must be learned from family, community and the media. Some young Italians want to understand their history but do not know where to look. If they do not have authentic Italian role models to teach them, they will turn to the models offered by the media and adopt a cultural identity based on the romanticized myths of the Mafia, or turn away in shame at the uneducated, funny-talking, overemotional other model presented by the media. Perhaps the noted Italian-American poet Sandra Gilbert says it best when she writes, in her poem titled "Mafioso":

> Frank Costello eating spaghetti in a cell at San Quentin,
> Lucky Luciano mixing up a mess of bullets and
> Calling for parmesan cheese,
> Al Capone baking a sawed-off shotgun into a
> Huge lasagna—
> Are you my uncles, my
> only uncles? (56)

The efforts of Italian-Americans to tell their lived story, to redefine the image of Italians in the media and to pass on an authentic identity to their younger generations are being thwarted by popular culture and the public's demand for their beloved Mafia images. Since the power of the media is not one that responds to reason, it is up to Italians themselves to counteract these false messages and tell their real, authentic stories to the new generations. Only then will there be a chance for Italian authenticity.

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Call Me Moby

Translated from the Whalesong

BY MATTHEW R. SILLIMAN

A certain Mr. Herman Melville (or mayhap his true name be "Ishmael," there being some confusion in his relation to his narrator's conceit) has penned a lengthy and rambling missive regarding, among many other ill-sorted subjects, the near-genocidal institution of whale killing, with the evident intention of making this barbaric practice out to be romantic, even heroic. Among the least of his many invidious crimes, though most irritating to this reviewer, is his having appropriated for the title of his murderous diatribe the name *Moby-Dick*, an appellation by which I myself am widely known, though his portrayal of the character so named is but barely recognizable even to my best friends, save for my unusual size and the color of my skin—and are not these fine things upon which to presume to judge a fellow creature! For long I thought silence the noblest reply to slanders of such a preposterous sort (and from a member of a species that has barely gotten its feet wet besides), but time and the irksome persistence of the offending novel in print incline me finally to speak, and speak I shall. Call me Moby.

This raconteur, spinner of tall, watery tales, and self-styled expert on all things upon and beneath the waves, early shows his utter ignorance of his subject by insisting, at great and tedious length, that whales are fish, misled no doubt by such benighted malapropisms as the then-common phrase "American Whale Fishery" (in reference to the aforementioned vast criminal conspiracy to genocide) and other such errors of language.

Now, let me be the first to assert, protest and affirm, before the world dry and wet, that there is nothing whatever the matter with being a fish; it is an ancient and noble calling, if rather excessively scaly. I hold no brief with fishes here or elsewhere. No, my quarrel with our author on this point commences, not in personal insult, but in a disinterested and collegial concern for such blatant imprecision in one who affects so scientific a perspicacity. Lest his readership be misled, then, let it be known from the whale's own mouth, and let it be known well, that I am no more a fish for my briny home than is Mr. Ishmael himself a Tyrannosaurus, for all that he tramp like one upon the land, voracious in his ignorant arrogance. "Call me Rex."

And speaking of tyrants, what of this poor fellow Ahab? A murderous loon, to be sure, and no doubt deserving of some goodly proportion of his fate, but how befits it a decent, Christian gentleman, such as our author presents himself, so to share every sordid detail of a madman's raving with the world at large, the captain's long-suffering wife herself not even yet in her grave? What meanness of spirit puts this desperate insanity at center stage, when from the beginning the whole gruesome business was, after all, principally about the oil? That Ahab was mad there is no doubt, beyond even the norm for his race and time; but if megalomaniac he was, who, I must protest, was the *mega* of his low mania?

For my own part I plead self-defense, and took no gargantuan satisfaction or delight in the destruction of the *Pequod* and its crew. Byfloaters they were to a man, though not thereby wholly innocent. I acted not in rage or from spite (as the putative lone survivor would have it), the magnified reflection of Ahab's obsession, but merely as an activist in the cause of my own kind. I had to come up for air *sometime*, after all, and it was *they* who were chasing *me*; 'tis a bitter squid then to swallow Melville's alternate and inconsistent portrayal of me, now as a blind force of nature (a whale's eyes are not small; it is only that our heads are large), or then again as a furious agent of cruel revenge. The net of his own cruelty he casts so wide, far beyond the bounds of his principal victims we whales, as to snag even the ill and defenseless of his own species—not to say Ahab, peg leg and all, could not ably have defended himself had he survived to review the novel on his own account. But of course he did not, which rather makes my point.

Some considerable time has passed since the first publication of this unholy eponymous disquisition, and in the course of such time it has come to be thought, unaccountably, a literary classic. Classic, indeed![1] So much the worse for literature, say I, if such scabrous libel as this compose its classics! Far better it had drifted in the obscure waters of boys' adventure tales (whence verbose and grandiloquent lies belong, and can do little harm not already done), as during its author's mortal life it did, in fact. But then, perhaps, if what is called "classic literature"consists chiefly of books heard of but remaining unread to the last (unless selected by Oprah), that may yet be this tome's singularly appropriate boneyard, and may it rest there in peace but (in the words of our author's contemporary Mr. Marx) for the gnawing criticism of the mice.

South Pacific, March 2005

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[1] **Translater's note:** This is an approximation; the author actually says "Skreee! Glub, GLUB, glub!" which is strictly untranslatable, expressing a unique combination of scorn, disgust, outrage and pflugg, a sentiment with no close analogue in the human emotional repertoire.

Contributors

Stewart Burns, civil rights historian, served as an editor of the King Papers at Stanford, editing the third volume, *Birth of a New Age.* He wrote the only published history of the Montgomery bus boycott, *Daybreak of Freedom,* which was made into an award-winning HBO dramatic film, *Boycott.* His biography of King, *To the Mountaintop:* "Martin Luther King Jr.'s Mission to Save America," was published in January 2004 by HarperCollins, now in paperback. He serves as MCLA grants coordinator and visiting professor of history.

Nick Fleck has retired from Northfield Mount Hermon School after 40 years of teaching. In the past two years, he has had poems published in a number of small-press magazines, including *Equinox, Pine Island Journal, Blueline* and *Connecticut River Review.* White Pine Press of Paradise, California, has published his *A Poet's Cancer Journal.* Sauntering in the river valley and nearby hills is his great pleasure.

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